

# TIM TURNER



## Tell us about your work

I spent much of my childhood outdoors, especially during summers in Algonquin Park, where I developed a deep appreciation for nature. These early experiences not only taught me self-reliance but instilled a sense of belonging in the wilderness that ultimately shaped my career. I was always drawn to geography and biology in college, and after graduating, I traveled with my brother. During those travels, my passion for the wild merged with a growing commitment to social justice.

I came back to the Pacific Northwest with a renewed purpose and became an outdoor and experiential educator, guiding youth and adults through forests, intertidal zones, the open ocean, and the backcountry. Over time, I developed curricula in ecology, geology, and geography, all with a vision of sustainable, empowering education. In 1992, I co-founded Sea to Sky Outdoor School with my partner, Wendy.



Since then, the program has hosted thousands of children, school groups, and teachers annually, immersing them in what I call the “three R’s of education: real, relevant, and revolutionary.” Sea to Sky focuses on sustainability, fostering ecological awareness, self-reliance, and an understanding of the urgency surrounding climate change. As I like to put it, “The stakes are too high for it to be anything but radical.”

Outside of Sea to Sky, I am a grandfather, a resident of Howe Sound, and an activist. I campaign tirelessly to protect local ecosystems, currently focusing on defending the Sound from the planned Coastal Gas Link terminal, which threatens many recently revitalized habitats.



## What makes your work hard?

We face various challenges in this work, from logistical hurdles to systemic issues. Staffing has been a primary challenge at Sea to Sky. Finding and retaining people who align with our vision is crucial. I truly believe we're only as good and capable as those that surround us and having a committed team is essential. Also, being an innovative institution has its complexities. Traditional education systems often resist the kind of 'radical' outdoor learning we promote and I'm frequently navigating when to take risks without compromising the program's stability. We find ourselves questioning structures that limit student empowerment and environmental awareness as a continuing process. Another key obstacle we face is society's 'distractibility,' which diverts attention away from climate issues.

I believe this is worsened by a media-saturated environment, constant bad news, and inadequate regulation of screen time. We put a lot of attention on inspiring young people to recognize that they can take meaningful action despite global challenges. We aim to instill a sense of agency amid a culture of distraction and despair. For those who are feeling overwhelmed by the scale of climate change, I advise connecting with a community, engaging in local causes, and finding hands-on work.



## How do you envision your work being continued?



I see my legacy in my grandchildren and the younger staff at Sea to Sky. I consider my grandchildren my “long-term project,” and they motivate me to protect the wilderness they will inherit. My aspirations remain local, focused on ensuring that both my human and environmental community thrive.

## What gives you hope?

For me, hope lies in the interconnectedness of our world; even small actions create ripple effects. I often remind people of Margaret Mead’s words: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world - Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” I also find hope in the younger generation’s willingness to confront environmental issues and their sense of wonder for wild places like Howe Sound. I want them to be committed to preserving these spaces for future generations.

## For older readers

At this stage in life, I can take risks without institutional constraints, and I encourage other older adults to do the same. “Admit more risk into your life, support in whatever capacity you can, don’t disengage.”

## For younger readers

Go wild and get outside because there is no substitute for time in nature. I warn against a “comfort crisis” and encourage young people to resist distractions and push against the ease of modern life. If someone or something makes you feel crazy, wrong, or naive, it’s often the system, not you, that’s broken.





**Tim is a proud resident of the Atl'katsem Howe Sound UNESCO Bioregion**



**SPEC Elders Circle**  
Legacy-making as Elder-making

## About Elders in our Midst

The Elders in our Midst project celebrates seniors across British Columbia and Canada who have contributed meaningfully to climate action in their communities. Through youth-led interviews and Joy Hanser's hand-painted portraits, it highlights their unique efforts and inspires all generations to foster community-driven climate action.

### **Learn More and Connect**

Elders in Our Midst: [spec.bc.ca/eldersinourmidst](https://spec.bc.ca/eldersinourmidst)

Elders Circle: [spec.bc.ca/eldercircle](https://spec.bc.ca/eldercircle)

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